

Review of a Pastor or Pastoral Team

Process in Pastoral Reviews

The Consultancy Request

A pastoral review may be a primary focus in calling for a consultancy. This could be the outcome of a pro-active church policy or a denominational policy, a wise parish council / board or a reflective minister. It may also be the recommendation of an outside party e.g. the minister's mentor or a denominational leader.

Reviews are always best as proactive formative processes not as reactive summative processes.

Situations to be aware of and cautious about:

1. If the Pastor is close to completion of a term and the review is expected to make a recommendation about concluding or extending the position.
2. If there is reason to suspect the review has been requested as a means of processing conflict.
3. If there is concern that the Pastor may be approaching burnout.

Objectives

The objective of facilitating a healthy review process for the pastor or pastoral team is usually a given in these consultancies.

The scope and basis of the review needs to be clear to all parties.

i.e. The review is of the senior pastor's leadership role in the church and recommendations are sought concerning leadership development, terms and conditions of employment, adjustments to the position description and ways the church better support the pastor.

Will this be paralleled by a review of the parish council / board? Will there also be a congregational review?

It is now a commonly held view that it is unfair to review a pastor in complete isolation from reviewing the staff team, governing board and often the congregation as a whole.

Equipping a Review Group

Consultants usually seek to work with an appointed internal review group and they consequently act as leaders, process advisors and resource people to this group.

In a review process, the group should not be large, 2 – 3 individuals, male and female, capable of dealing with confidential information, aware of the importance of process, spiritually mature, nominated and appointed by both the pastor / pastoral leadership team and the governing body (Church council / church board). The church governing group is represented on this review group but the group should also have members not on the council or board.

Consultants meet with this group to design the process. The tasks are shared out among group members (i.e. not everyone does everything).

Gathering Data

1. Interviews
 1. A professional interview with the pastor or pastoral team members. This interview looks at the role of leadership in ministry; position description, relationships with staff and governing leaders, leadership skills, ministries, professional development, etc.
 2. A personal interview with pastor and spouse. This interview explores personal issues connected to ministry: impact of ministry on family, terms and conditions, self care strategies, stress levels etc.
 3. Depending on whether a 360 process is being used, there may be a range of other interviews scheduled by the team. Normal discernment around the use of interviews should be applied I.e care of who is interviewed, interview process reliability.

2. Some form of general reflective survey / questionnaire
 1. Surveys are the other common process used in pastoral reviews. These can be:
 1. a simple set of open ended questions,
 2. a standardised survey or leadership instrument, or
 3. a survey designed for this review.

3. Conflict

It is important to notes, review processes are not a process for dealing with conflict. Always indicate the need for conflict to be dealt with outside the review process. If it does come up strongly in the review, it should be carefully documented and a recommendation about dealing with it made.

The Report

Significant care needs to be taken with a Pastoral Review report!!

1. Work out what goes in the formal report to the governing group in the church. This needs to be clear and formative.
2. Work out what will be best contained in a private report or via private feedback to the pastor.
3. Know whether the report be forwarded to the denomination's appropriate officer?

Other potential situations that give rise to a pastoral review

1. The value of a pastoral review may become apparent out of an objectives evening at the start of a consultancy. If the idea of a review was not clearly on the agenda before the evening, the consultants may need to reflect on the best process to use to complete this objective. There may need to be some insight gained into the reasons the review was affirmed as a key objective.
2. The consultants, in working on other aspects of church life in a consultancy, may receive enough information and feedback that warrants including a recommendation in their report that a review process for the pastor or pastoral team be conducted.
3. If needed, a recommendation to participate in a pastoral review may be included in a confidential private report to the pastor. This may also include :
 1. Recommendations for professional support, supervision, mentoring or counselling
 2. Recommendations for taking leave or specific self care strategies
 3. Recommendations to build supportive relationships both within and outside the congregation.
4. In particularly challenging circumstances, there may be a recommendation given to a pastor to discuss his / her future in the church with the appropriate denominational ministry or pastoral executive or committee. Again this is usually given privately in detail and only a summary point made in the main report with the pastor's permission.